



Aide to Africa

A HOLMDEL RESIDENT HELPS HER ORPHANED AND IMPOVERISHED
 “GRANDKIDS” FIND FAMILIES, FOOD AND HOPE

In Tanzania and Uganda, Sylvia Allen came face to face with poverty. She saw people living with no running water or electricity, families who walked five to 10 miles for fresh water and 8-year-old children who steered cattle and sheep, while training little 4-year-olds to do the same.

The Holmdel resident, 67, who has run a marketing firm for the past 26 years, was teaching “How to Ask for Money,” a course on fund-raising at New York University when, at the behest of one of her students, she agreed to accompany a group of ministers on a trip to Africa to lend her business expertise.

What she saw there changed her life. She met with more than 30 orphaned boys between the ages of 8 and 16 who were living in rubble and begging on the street. In the Masaka village in Uganda, she visited homes ravaged by AIDS. She met a father who weighed 80 pounds and an 11-year-old who was the head of the household because both parents had fallen victim to the disease. “I felt like I was being hit on the chest with a baseball bat,” says Allen. “I’d heard about it and read about it, but now it was real.”

One day, after leading a discussion with a group of proprietors on how to negotiate their coffee beans and other business ventures, the leader of the village asked to speak with Allen. As a token of apprecia-

tion, he anointed her “grandmother” to 416 primary school children, 58 of whom are orphans. Rather than give each of her new “grandkids” a small gift, Allen returned home with the resolve to make a difference in their lives.

Back in Holmdel, where Allen lives with her husband Tom (her son and daughter are now in their 30s), she founded Sylvia’s Children, a nonprofit dedicated to feeding, clothing, housing and educating hundreds of African children. Thus far, Sylvia’s Children has raised more than \$6,000, with a goal of reaching \$30,000. At that point, Allen will return to Masaka to buy a home for the boys.

Reaching out to friends and colleagues, Allen has managed to get eight of the 58 orphans “adopted” thus far—a donation of \$360 ensures one child will have adequate food, clothing, shelter and education for a year. In return, the sponsor receives photos and letters from the child. Rick Willgerodt of Little Silver, a friend of Allen’s, sponsored a 4-year-old girl named Nassiwa. “When you give to an organization like Sylvia’s Children, there are no hidden costs,” he says. “You know exactly where your money is going.”

Allen admits that her goals are lofty, but as her friends will attest, she’s not a quitter. After all, her grandchildren are counting on her. *oM*